

MEMOIRS *of a* CORPORATION



Weaving a Century

CHAPTER IV

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PACIFIC MILLS

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MEMOIRS *of a* CORPORATION

The Story of Mary and Mack and Pacific Mills

with the editorial assistance of Josef Berger



Weaving a Century

PACIFIC MILLS

**Executive Offices: 140 Federal Street
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS**

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DEDICATION

*To the memory of those gallant workers of
Pacific Mills who died in service of their country
on the battlefields of four wars, this series
of booklets is reverently dedicated . . .*

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Vice-President
Vice-President
Vice-President
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This is the fourth of a series of booklets being published by Pacific Mills at monthly intervals through the current year in commemoration of the founding of the company one hundred years ago.

If you did not receive the preceding chapters, Pacific Mills will be glad to send them to you on request. Write to Pacific Mills, 140 Federal Street, Boston 10, Mass.



IV

Unto the Fourth Generation

Expertly, Mary Carmack cleared knots and loose threads from the broad sheet of “gray” cloth that rolled down endlessly before her.

In the mending and burling department Mary was a good little worker — fingers deft and sure, blue eyes alert for the marks of the inspector. Blue of old Ireland, those eyes were, blue that had come, generations ago, from skies over the mountains of Connemara.

This afternoon there was a dreamy sheen in them. Mary was thinking of Mack, and of his invention.

Mack worked as “second hand” — assistant to the overseer — in the finishing department. The “invention” wasn’t really important enough, Mack said, to be called that. Just an idea, a gadget, to save time.

All the same, when he outlined it to her last night at home, he was excited. It was too technical for Mary, but she told him it was wonderful. She was sure it must be. Probably something that would revolutionize the whole textile industry. Any idea Mack had would be wonderful. Didn't she know? Wasn't it Mack's idea, a year ago, that they get married? At least it hadn't taken him too long to catch on!

But Mack was shy. The kind that thought a lot but wouldn't speak up. Not for himself. Of course, the King of England was shy, too. Funny, how so many great men were just like Mack!

But when she told him he ought to do something with his idea — patent it, or at least tell the management — Mack backed away. There might be some hitch, he said. If it didn't work, he would look foolish. Some day, maybe, he'd mention it to the overseer. Then he picked up the newspaper and buried himself in it.

Mary knew what that meant. But she wouldn't give up. She told him she didn't quite understand how the gadget worked. Would he explain it again and draw a diagram?

Next morning at the mill, Mary paused at the foot of the stairs and stealthily slipped a fat envelope in the suggestion box.

And all that day, in the eyes of Mary Carmack, a sheen of dreams was brightening the blue that had come, long ago, from the skies over the mountains of Connemara.

A few days later, as Mack was checking the acid solution in the carbonizer, the overseer came and tapped him on the shoulder.

"They want you up in the main office."

While he was washing up, a dozen fears loomed before his mind like a firing squad. With a single "boner" in the finishing department you could cost the company plenty of money. Why did they want to see him in the office? What had he done?

Upstairs, the plant manager, a big fellow known as one of the ablest men in the industry, plain as an old shoe and much more popular, began by saying:

"I hate to do this."

"Oh-oh!" Mack told himself. "Looks like this is it!"

"Just when I have a big batch of orders coming in! They want you in Boston, Carmack. Be ready to go in the morning?"

"Yes, sir — if I have to." Mack gawked in puzzlement. "Would you mind telling me, sir, what they want of me?"

"If I knew," the plant manager growled, "I could argue!" Nevertheless, there was a twinkle in his eye that made Mack suspect he knew more than he was telling.

At shift-end Mary was waiting for him. Her eyes danced.

"Oh, Mack, I just know they're going to use your new gimmick! Did they tell you? We're going to Boston!"

"What? You, too? Mary, what's this all about?"

"Why, it's about John Carmack, being so smart and making an invention."

"My idea? How'd they find out?"

She gave him an innocent stare. "I guess you must have been talking to someone."

You could look far out over Boston Harbor through the office windows on the eighteenth floor at 140 Federal Street. You could watch the ships pass and fade into the blue haze. It was pleasant here, high above the noises of the city.

The voice of the company official quickly brought Mack's gaze back to the figure facing him across the desk.

"We have tested your idea," the company official was saying. "It works. We're going to use it, and when you get back home you will find a check in your mailbox — our reward to you."

Mary couldn't keep back a little crow of delight. Mack was pleased and embarrassed. Of course Mary couldn't help it — that was just the way the good Lord made her and you had to love her for it — but all the same Mack hoped she'd keep her mouth shut while they were up here among the big shots and speak only when she was spoken to, the way he was doing. To the company official he mumbled his thanks.

"Maybe you're wondering why I called you all the way to Boston just to tell you this," the company official went on. "It's because I've looked up your record, Mack." He spoke quietly, earnestly. "I liked what I found. And I liked your background.

"Your father worked for Pacific Mills," he continued, "and your grandfather and great-grandfather. Four generations of Carmacks with Pacific Mills for nearly a hundred years! I started digging into their records, too. I found those earlier Carmacks had the same spirit of ingenuity and enterprise you've shown yourself. And that interested me, got me to thinking.

"We're proud of the way our people stick with us. We're

proud of the long record of those four Carmacks. I'm sure you must be, too." He leaned forward in his swivel chair. "Tell me, Mack, have you ever stopped to think about that — four generations of your family, working for the same company? Does it give you a feeling of moving towards something, of getting nearer, from one generation to the next, toward some kind of goal — a road that's going somewhere, for your people and the company to travel together?"

"I can't say I've ever thought much about it just that way, sir," Mack answered honestly. "I get paid for my work, what it's worth. So did Dad. It's always seemed fair enough."

The company official glanced down at a typed memo on his desk. "You live in one of those new bungalows in Andover. Own it yourself?"

"We're buying it."

"Your great-grandfather built a house on Margin Street in Lawrence, nearly a century ago, Mack. It wasn't anything like your house. No central heat, no electric lights, no telephone, not even inside plumbing. And the mill he worked in then — you'd scarcely recognize it as the same plant today. The equipment was a far cry from the cards, the spinning frames and the automatic looms we use in Lawrence now. It had none of the wonderful new processes of our cotton mills in the South.

"The Carmacks helped make it possible for Pacific Mills to buy those machines and develop those processes. At the same time, Pacific Mills and the other great industries of our country

have done something for the living standards of the Carmacks. In your home you have many of the good things of life that the first John Carmack in America never had."

He paused, then asked, "Did you drive in from Andover this morning?"

Mack nodded.

"You made those twenty-five miles, taking it easy, in less than an hour.

"Do you know how long the same trip would have taken John Carmack the First? By stagecoach to Lowell, then by wood-burning railway train to Boston, and by horse-car from the station, it would have taken up the better part of a day. Not counting the bath he would have had to take — in a wooden tub — to get the soot out of his hide after he arrived here.

"How much did your car cost you, Mack, and how long did you have to work to pay for it out of your wages?"

"Eighteen hundred. Took me about two years."

"John Carmack the First had no automobile. But let's suppose Mandrake the Magician popped out of a jug one morning, a hundred years ago, and laid before him the complete blueprint and specifications for that car you own today. Do you know what it would have cost to build your car at that time? In terms of labor at today's wages, a little more than \$100,000!

"That's because they would have had to make it by hand," the company official continued. "Today your car can be produced for \$1,800 instead of \$100,000, and you can pay for it

in two years instead of 111 years, because tools have been perfected that save men's time and energy.

"In the days before Pacific Mills went into business, the making of a piece of cloth was nineteen parts elbow grease to one part machinery. Today the recipe goes the other way.

"But, Mack, the tools that have made that \$100,000 car available to you at a \$98,000 discount didn't just pop out of thin air. Somebody had to invent them. Somebody had to invest money to build and install them — and be willing to take his licking if the gamble went sour.

"Somebody had to work out a way of keeping those tools in continuous use, of repairing them, replacing them when they wore out, and improving on them when there were bigger jobs to be done.

"At the same time, the more cheaply goods were made, the more expensive were the tools for making them.

"When your great-grandfather worked for Pacific Mills, the company took long strides toward bringing down the price of cloth. It spent a lot of money advancing the techniques of mass production.

"Yet even then, with its unprecedented investment in plant and machinery, the cost of creating the first John Carmack's job was only \$714.

"Today, for the job the fourth John Carmack holds, Pacific Mills has invested \$10,909. And for the job of Mary Carmack, another \$10,909."

. . .

"But I can't expect that story to mean much to you in dull figures," the company official went on. "I'd like for you to get it first hand, Mack, the whole picture of this corporation, past and present, from the mills and the people who work in them.

"This year, as the Carmacks and Pacific Mills are rounding out a century of working together, I think it would be a good idea for you and Mary to see and understand what this company is all about. So, in addition to your reward for the invention, I've arranged a complete tour of Pacific Mills for you two.

"You'll start with Lawrence. Day in and day out, you've both worked there, but I doubt if either of you has ever seen more than a tiny fraction of the whole big operation. Then you'll go to the cotton mills in South Carolina, the worsted mills in North Carolina and Virginia, and the designing and sales offices in New York." He paused. "How about it? Think you'll be interested?"

Mack's thoughts went back to the plant manager at Lawrence. He was about to ask how much time the trip would take, but before he could open his mouth, Mary, blue eyes alight, announced they would love it.

"Before you go," the company official said, "I thought you might like to hear a bit of the story of Pacific Mills management — some of the things that were going on in the main office while the Carmacks were making a relatively peaceful living in the mill.

"I'll not try to give you the whole story. A big corporation's family tree has too many branches and twigs, too many rich

uncles and poor relations. I can only hope to sketch it in roughly.”

Mary and Mack were put at their ease, lunch was brought up and, while they ate, the company official went ahead with his story.

When Pacific Mills set up in business (the company official said) there was a seller's market for textiles in America. You know — demand stronger than supply, like the beautiful young girl who draws all men around her at the Ladies' Lyceum and Croquet Club ball.

The unfilled demand lasted up to the end of the nineteenth century. Pacific Mills had no trouble marketing anything it made.

Its first product was cotton goods. But the mill was soon weaving a mixed fabric which in those days was classed as “worsted.” The cross-thread or filling was of imported worsted yarn and the lengthwise thread or warp was of cotton spun in Lawrence.

The demand for these goods was so great that a separate mill was built in 1864 for the “worsteds.” Still later, in the seventies, this mill was making true worsteds, using wool in both warp and filling.

These came to be known in the trade as “corporation serges.” They were coarse suitings of rough fabric. They used to say when a fellow went a-courting his girl in one of those serges he was starting from scratch.

The worsteds, like the cottons, were sold to other companies for manufacture into clothing. Pacific Mills made no finished garments, and makes none today.

The cotton division, in the beginning, turned out calicoes, which were cheap prints on coarse wash goods, mostly in bright colors. These went into women's dresses.

You've seen pictures of those old-fashioned bathing suits folks wore through the Gay Nineties, complete with long stockings for the ladies and full north and south coverage. Pacific also turned out a lot of the makings for those old atrocities.

The huge print works handled not only the calicoes, but also delaines and challies. Delaines were lightweight worsted fabrics of fine yarn in plain weave, and the challies soft, light blends of cotton and wool, printed usually in small flower designs. That's why the founders of the company installed more printing machines than they needed for their own cotton output.

Pacific Mills is unique among great textile manufacturers in certain ways, one of these being that it operates in both cotton and wool, going the whole way in the complete processing of each. The company got started in both because Abbott Lawrence, "brain-father" of Pacific Mills, saw a chance to cut costs by using the same print works for both cotton calicoes and wool challies. Besides, he was working out a tremendous experiment in industrial integration. He wanted to put the whole three-ring circus under one tent and then watch the fun.

One thing that came out of it was a finishing capacity much larger than Pacific needed for the cloth woven by its own looms.

But this worked out well, because the company developed a profitable business in printing, dyeing and finishing cloth woven by other mills. Today most primary cotton mills leave off with the weaving. The “gray” cloth is taken by others — converters — and sent to special finishing mills. Pacific is one of the minority that finishes up the cloth woven by its own looms.

. . .

Away back, four years after the mills at Lawrence began making cloth, the treasurer, in his report, gave a breakdown of Pacific Mills’ output. In the six months to November 30, 1857, he said, “There have been manufactured of calicoes 62,910 pieces or 2,535,116 yards, and of delaines 107,355 pieces or 3,354,062 yards. The yards of calicoes, delaines and lawns printed were 7,896,874.”

That was in time of deep depression, when Pacific’s fate was hanging in the balance. It shows that even in that dark hour the company was a producer, and for its time a big one.

Production was what saved it; and from those beginnings it soon spread out its lines, keeping well up in front of the industry during the post-Civil War years in the matter of adding new fabrics and improving the quality of its old ones.

If those old “corporation serges” took the paint off the parlor rocker, at least they compared well with the low-priced suitings other mills were turning out at the time.

. . .

Pacific was lucky in having a wide-awake selling agency, Little, Alden & Company, of Boston, which later became James

L. Little & Company. Mr. Little was a prophet of fashion and kept the mills well advised of what the public wanted.

The story is told that one day, in a moment of impatience with him because one of his style recommendations had missed the mark, stern Wiley Edmands, then treasurer, wired to Little in New York:

CONSIDERING ADDING ANOTHER AGENT STOP AS SHAKESPEARE SAID QUOTE TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE.

Whereupon Little at once wired back:

ADVISE AGAINST ADDING ANOTHER AGENT STOP SHAKESPEARE ALSO SAID QUOTE MORE THAN A LITTLE IS BY MUCH TOO MUCH.

It was a time of awakening in America to the fact that if clothes could not make the man, at least they could make him look twice at the woman. American women were reading Godey's Lady's Book. They wanted more and more to dress as the women of Paris did.

Talk of the new fashions spread from city to village and country byroad. In the Old Farmer's Almanac there is a story that went the rounds, characteristic of those years. A gentleman from Boston, visiting a friend in the country, complained that his wife had spent fifty dollars for a habit. His friend, a hardbitten old down-Easter, answered, "Here in the country we don't allow our wives to get into such habits."

But the ladies, with or without permission, did get into the fashion habit, to such a degree that Jim Little found it good

business to send scouts and copyists to Paris and also to keep a corps of stylists busy in his New York office and at the mill in Lawrence.

There were no wire-photos or one-day transatlantic services in those days, but when it came to dress styles, news traveled as if by magic.

Once in the eighties a haughty British peeress, planning a visit to America, that great, raw country of the barbarians, commissioned her Paris modiste to make a gown of silk with an embroidered design, a stylized version of her family coat-of-arms. It made a rather nice pattern. She was going to show up those gauche Americans!

But on reaching the shores of this uncouth country, what should she find but her American hostess's housemaid wearing a cotton print of the same design! Wherever she went, every little snip of a governess, every tradeswoman was wearing it. In a fury, Her Ladyship tore the lovely gown to shreds.

. . .

By 1873, not quite twenty years after Pacific Mills started, its annual output of worsteds had risen to 22,000,000 yards, and there were other millions of yards of prints, sheetings and cretonnes. The cretonnes, bright floral patterns with dull finish, were used widely for furniture coverings and draperies.

In 1880, when Henry Saltonstall of the famed Boston family took over as treasurer, Pacific's chief worsted products were listed as storm ("corporation") serges, poplin and alpaca lustres, cassimeres, merinos and jacquards.



The haughty British peeress was going to show up those gauche Americans . . . until her hostess' maid appeared wearing a cotton print of the same design as her Paris silks!

The feature of poplin was a fine rib effect running across the cloth from selvage to selvage. The cassimeres were fancy suitings in stripes, checks and plaids. The merinos were soft fabrics in fine wool, sometimes mixed with cotton. And the jacquards were fancy weave patterns. Among cottons, main items were percales, corded jaconets (somewhat like lawns but stiffened a little after bleaching), organdies, lawns, cretonnes and prints.

. . .

In most of the old textile mills of New England the treasurer was the real ruling power. That tradition has been carried on through the years, which explains why today the offices of treasurer and president of Pacific Mills are vested in the same person.

In those times of heavy demand for all textiles, few mill treasurers worried themselves into early graves. All the larger mills had separate selling agents, who not only found markets but also dictated styles and financed the transactions. Operation of the mill was the direct responsibility of the agent or resident manager. This left the treasurer in the middle — all-powerful, but with his problems in both selling and manufacture pretty well taken care of.

It used to be said that all the treasurer of a textile mill had to do was sit at his desk, buy cotton and coal, and ask each day what the rate was on call money.

Of course there was more to it than that. Like any job, it was as big as you cared to make it. This was true, too, of the local mill management.

The career of Walter E. Parker, who came to Pacific in 1881 to take charge of the cotton division and six years later became manager of the whole plant at Lawrence, is an example. In the years that followed he established himself as one of the biggest figures in textile history.

It was Parker, the agent — not the president of the company nor the treasurer — who ran Pacific Mills in those days. All Lawrence knew it and stood in awe of him. He also made it clear he wouldn't stand for any nonsense from Boston.

Rugged, strict, uncompromising, he was as old-school as a Back Bay bond-fancier. His pride and toughness gave rise to many a story around the mills, and he rather enjoyed these tales himself — at least he never bothered to deny them.

One of the whispers was that Parker insisted on being paid \$50,001 a year because the salary of the President of the United States was at that time \$50,000. It wasn't true — actually he wasn't paid anywhere near that figure — but the myth hung on.

It was true, however, that Parker believed a mill ought to be run with the same iron discipline that the old Yankee sea captains maintained over their crews.

One of the traditions on board ship was that the skipper never spoke directly to his foremast hands. When he wanted to give an order he addressed himself to the mate, who passed it along.

Parker liked the idea. Though scrupulously fair in his business dealings with them, he saw no reason why the same practice shouldn't have an edifying effect on the people in the mill.

It didn't. Nevertheless, he never spoke to the mill hands, nor even to the overseers when he could avoid it, and did his directing only through the superintendents or their assistants. Also, he strictly forbade any departure from routine, however slight or for whatever reason, without his express permission.

Eddie, one of Parker's assistant superintendents in the worsted mill, and an able fellow otherwise, was afflicted with the habit of stuttering. The more excited he became, the more he stuttered; and when he had business with the Big Boss, he could scarcely talk at all.



Stuttering Eddie, wide-eyed and panting, dashed into Parker's office . . .

One morning Eddie dashed into Parker's office, wide-eyed and panting. He'd even forgotten to knock. Before the August Presence he stood, opening and closing his mouth but giving forth no sound.

Parker, deep in work, looked up from a pile of papers, sat back and glared impatiently. Eddie tried again. Still nothing happened. Finally Parker growled, "I can't wait all day. Write it down!" And shoved a piece of paper and a pencil across the desk. Frantically, poor Eddie scrawled:

John Byrnes fell through wool-sorting glory hole on second floor — landed in blending pile on first floor — disappeared in wool — can we stop sorting and dig him out?

. . .

It was during these years, in the 1880's, that the company began plowing back a good part of its earnings into improvements and additions to the old plant at Lawrence. Some of the big buildings standing there today went up during this era — the "lower mill" in 1882, "upper mill" in 1887.

After paying dividends to stockholders in an unbroken record for a quarter of a century, Pacific passed them in 1882 and 1883 to help finance this building program. One disgruntled old Bostonian, on getting news of the omission of payments, went about town mumbling:

"If I'd known Pass-ific was going to pass the dividend I'd never have bought the damned stock. Might just as well throw my money into the Pass-ific Ocean!"

If he had refrained from throwing his shares into the Pass-

ific Ocean for only two more years, however, his faith would have been rewarded handsomely. The company resumed dividends in 1884 and paid steadily for the next forty years.

Pacific's ability to hold its place as leader in the American textile industry was insured in 1883 when the mills engaged as selling agents the big Boston house of Lawrence & Company.

With headquarters at Franklin and Arch Streets and branch offices in New York and other large cities, that commission house was, until it dissolved a quarter of a century ago, one of the great commercial nerve centers of New England industry. Its list of partners was a roster of old family names, of wealth and influence that had grown through generations — in addition to the Lawrences, names like Lowell, Lyman, Howe, Everett, Saltonstall.

Production men like Walter Parker, however gifted in the intricacies of running a great mill, knew their own limitations. When they ventured into the financial or styling ends of the business they soon found themselves in water over their heads.

With common sense you could arrive at optimum efficiency ratios in the spinning and weave rooms, in finishing and dyeing. But all the common sense in the world wouldn't tell you what the women were going to be wearing next spring, nor was there any laboratory test known to science that foretold the twistings and turnings of sentiment among banks and investment houses.

The men who dominated Lawrence & Company, being in close touch with financial and style trends, wielded a tremen-

dous direct influence, therefore, over Pacific Mills. And it was the commission house that guided the company through the dangerous years when the textile industry had to adjust itself to the loss of its comfortable old seller's market, around the turn of the century, and sink or swim in the new, uncharted waters of increasingly fierce competition.



Next month Pacific Mills will send you another installment of "Memoirs of a Corporation, Weaving a Century." It will be entitled "Chapter V: New Heights, New Horizons."

